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Notes to Amuse a Legal Worker Series 1, No. 1: Reductionism

Anonymous (Rumored to be Frances Olsen)

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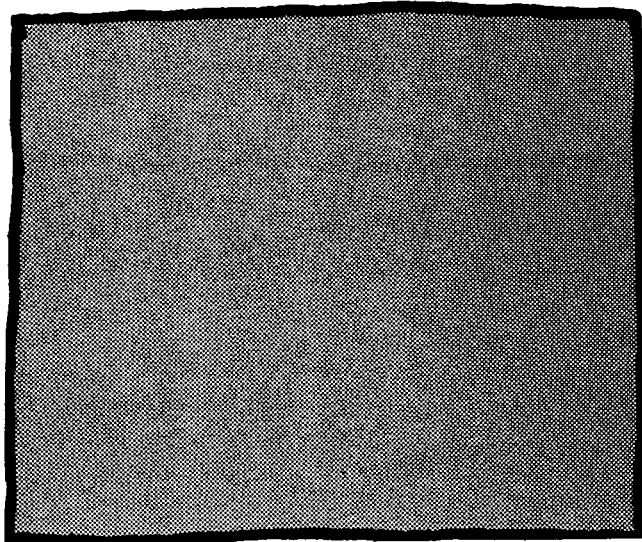
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Notes to Amuse a Legal Worker Series 1, No. 1: Reductionism

By Anonymous*

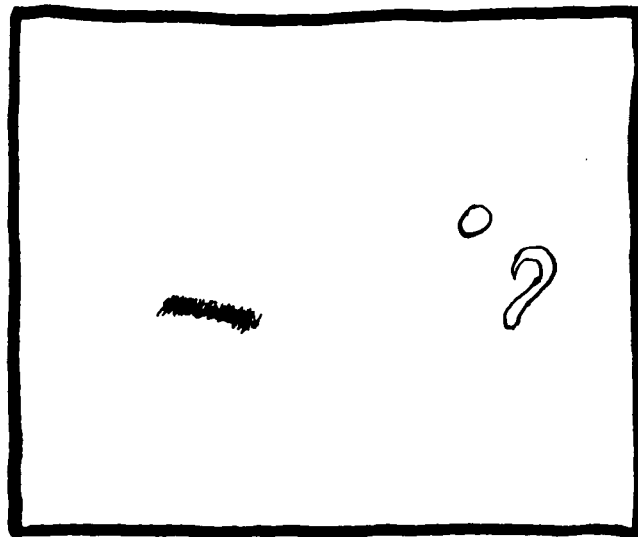
In the beginning was the fog:



* The following anonymous piece was slipped under the door of Duncan Kennedy, a Harvard Law Professor, while he was working as a paralegal for the Legal Services Institute at Jamaica Plain. There is a persistent rumor that "Anonymous" is none other than Frances Olsen.

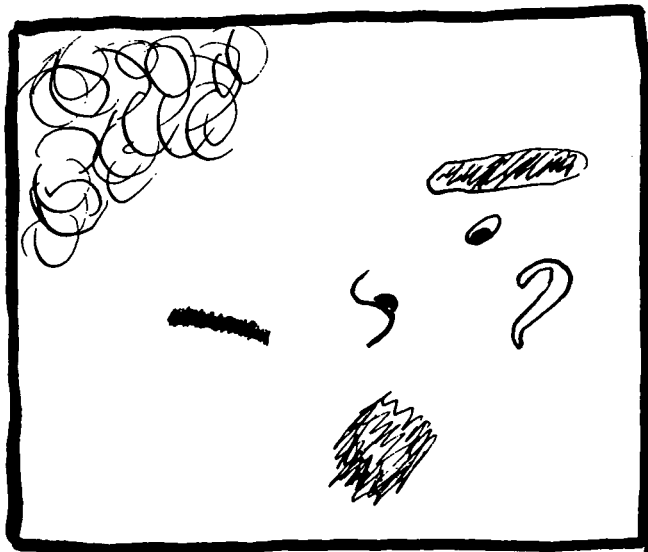
People began to study this fog, for all the reasons people tend to study things like fog. By that I mean, some people studied it because it was there; some because they thought it might be beautiful; some were curious, some bored. Some people studied it to advance their own careers, or to retard the careers of perceived enemies. Some studied the fog hoping thereby to improve the conditions of their class, or race, or sex; others hoped to advance someone else's class, or race, or sex. Still others hoped to advance humanity, or the universe; and, finally, some people studied it from habit.

As people studied the fog, they began to see occasional patterns. One person found a rectangle with a curious surface texture; another found an ear-shaped protrusion, while a third found a solid spherical object set back in a socket.

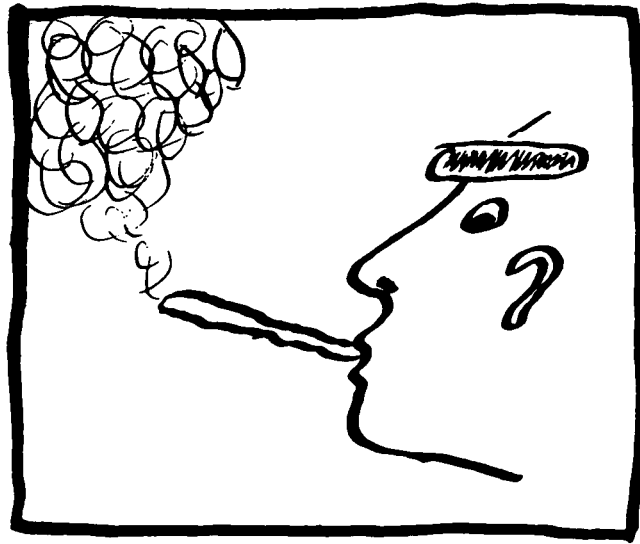


These discoveries were exciting and interesting. The scholars involved felt accomplished and creative, and they were honored and advanced in their careers. The classes and races and sexes and universe, however, all continued in the same status which they had enjoyed or suffered previously.

Spurred on by the excitement of discovery and the hope of success, scholars devoted themselves to studying one or another corner of the picture. The project continued and more particular patches of the fog gave way to curious patterns.

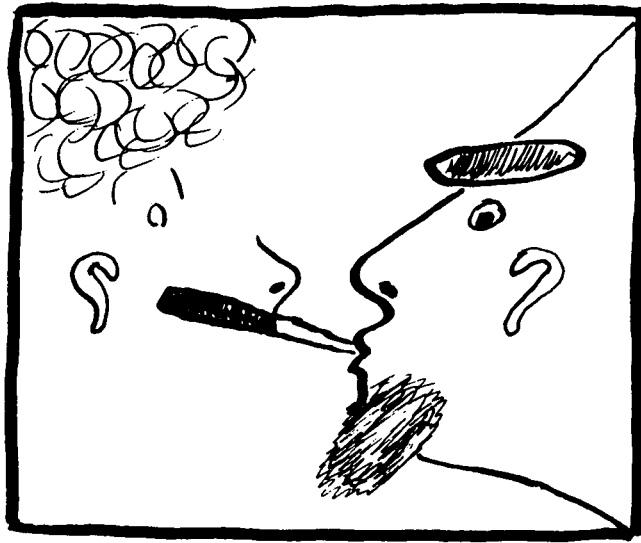


Then one day a very important thing happened. Someone new came along who decided not to choose a corner to study and not to study the particular details at all. Instead, he looked at the whole fog and he looked at the clear patches and he said, "I know what that fog is; it's a man smoking a cigar."



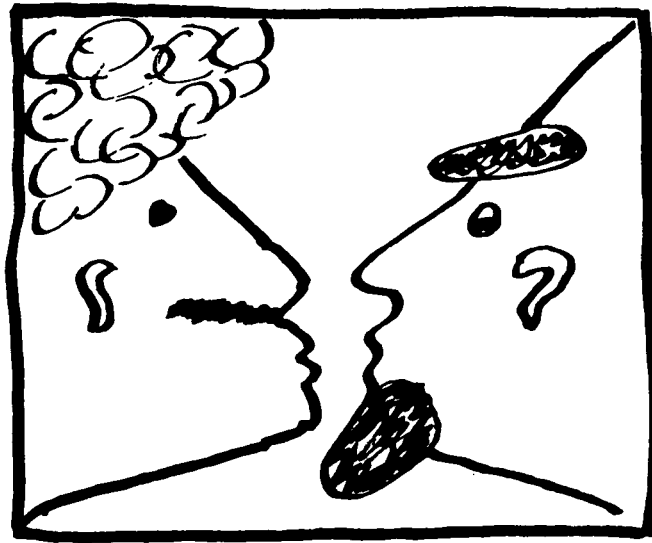
A few people got very excited about this and wondered what it would mean for the status of their class and race and sex and universe. A few people got nervous about it and wondered what it might mean for the status of their class, or race, or sex; so they laughed at the newcomer and said this was no way for serious adults to spend their time. Most people ignored the newcomer and just continued in their work.

Some of the people who just continued in their work just happened to be examining the patch of fog where the newcomer claimed the cigar-smoker's forehead was and they just happened to discover a pattern that seemed a lot like a forehead. Other people, however, determined to ignore the newcomer's assertions, began to fill in a more random pattern.



A few people were disappointed, a few people were relieved, and a few people were amused. Whether the newcomer was embarrassed or humiliated is not known.

However, he was not discouraged. He kept looking at the fog and he looked at the new patterns and he said, "I know now what that fog is; it's the heads of two people engaged in conversation."



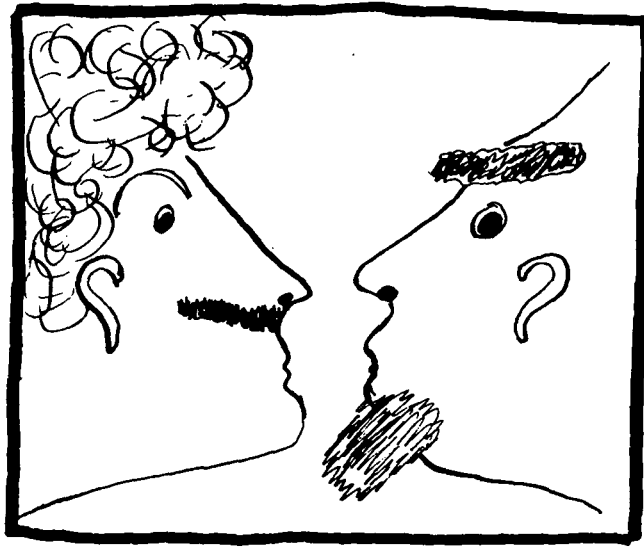
A lot of people paid attention to this claim by the newcomer, and his theory became quite controversial. Some people muttered that the newcomer himself so enjoyed conversation that he would think he saw two people talking anywhere he looked. Other people pointed out that the clear spaces didn't fit that picture, for example, the rectangle that at first had been a cigar. The newcomer couldn't explain that, they said, and it didn't fit within his scheme. A whole literature grew up arguing whether the rectangle could be a mustache or what else it might be. A few people found it offensive that so many people would pay so much attention to a man who merely pointed out the obvious gross features of the fog instead of getting down to the difficult work of close examination—especially when he was probably wrong about the gross features anyway. His own supporters couldn't agree about the cigar-mustache, after all.

There were many people, however (most of whom also enjoyed conversation), who found the insight of “two people talking” useful. Many areas of the fog which had been impenetrable began to show distinctive patterns.

1988]

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The process continued as more and more details were filled in and the picture became quite rich.

But then one day someone found an olive.

